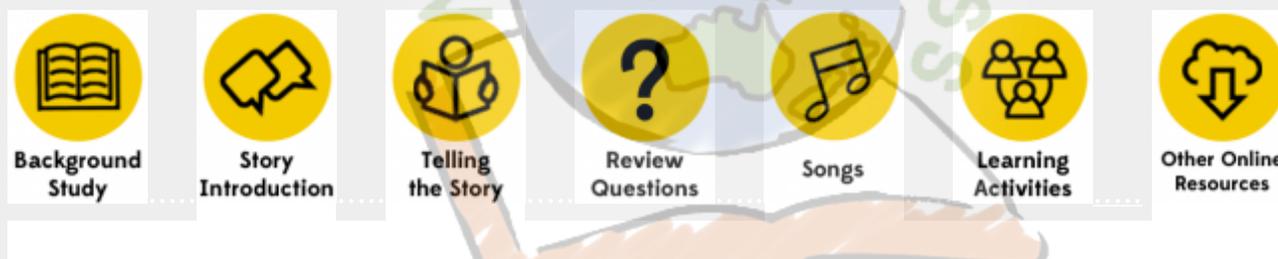


Elisha and the Widow's Oil

Scripture Reference: [2 Kings 4:1-7](#)



Suggested Emphasis: Emphasise that we should show compassion, especially to those whose loved ones are ill or have died.



Story Overview:

A prophet died and left debts that his widow and two sons could not pay. The creditor decided to take the two sons as slaves in payment of the debt. When the widow begged for Elisha's help, the Lord miraculously provided them with enough oil to sell and pay off the debt.

Background Study:

After the prophet Elijah was taken to heaven ([2 Kings 2:11](#)), his disciple and successor,

Elisha, became the chief prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel. He faithfully continued the work of the Lord as Elijah had done. He travelled on his own throughout the countryside, probably on a donkey led by a servant. He became known for his miracles ([2 Kings 2:19-22](#)).

In one town a poor widow approached Elisha. It has been thought by some that she was the widow of Obadiah, one of the sons of the prophets ([1 Kings 18](#)). This is not the same Obadiah for which the Old Testament bible book is named. That Obadiah lived many years after this one.

This poor widow was unable to pay the debts that her husband had left her with. She had only a small amount of olive oil in her home - nothing else of value. As was the common practice of the time, her two sons were going to have to work for the lender until the money was paid back. In this case, he was going to exact a more harsh payment. They were to become his slaves.

God's servant, Elisha, told the woman to borrow all the empty jars from her neighbours that she could possibly get, close her doors, and begin pouring the oil from her jar into the borrowed jars. As she obeyed, the widow saw that God provided enough oil to fill all the jars.

Almost every time the bible mentions oil, it is referring to olive oil. Oil that was pressed from the fruit of olive trees had many uses in biblical times. It was a dietary staple. It was spread on bread, used in cooking, and mixed with flour to make bread.

Oil was used as a religious offering ([Leviticus 2:4](#)), as a remedy for stomach distress and as a balm to heal wounds. It was also used as a fuel for lamps in homes. Soldiers often worked oil into the leather shields they used in battle. This kept the shields from becoming brittle.

Oil was also the base for making perfumes and fragrant ointments. When perfumers

boiled oil and then added secret blends of root and bark powders, tree resins and spices they could make very expensive ointment. One jar of oil-based myrrh, frankincense, cinnamon and aloe ointment could sell for as much as one labourer's yearly salary.

Oil was a precious item in international trade. Solomon had used it years before to pay for some of the supplies he used to build the temple ([2 Chronicles 2:10](#)).

When the widow told Elisha what had happened, he instructed her to sell the oil and pay off her husband's debts. The woman and her sons were then able to live on the money that was left over. Truly God provided Elisha to be a friend to this family in their time of need.

[Background Information on the Divided Kingdom.](#)

- [🔍 What happened before this story?](#)
- [📅 What happens after this story?](#)
- [📖 List of all Bible stories and themes on this website.](#)

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Way to Introduce the Story:

Bring some olives and olive oil to class today. Talk about some of the uses for olive oil. Let the children taste them. They could dip a little bread in the oil. Put a drop on each child's hand and let them use it as a hand lotion. "Olive oil was very precious in Old Testament times. People would spend a lot of money to buy olive oil. If you were poor, you would be very happy if you had some olive oil to sell. Let's find out about how people in our story today used olive oil."

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The Story:

Elisha was a prophet of God. God would give him messages to tell the people and Elisha would preach the messages to them. The prophet Elijah had taught Elisha how to be a prophet. Now that Elijah was gone, Elisha tried to obey God just like his teacher, Elijah, had.

God gave Elisha special power to do miracles. One time he went to a city where the water was unhealthy. The people did not want to drink it and it was so bad that plants would not grow when they were watered with it. Elisha asked the people of the city to bring him a bowl of salt. He poured the bowl of salt in the water. From then on the water was good to drink and good to water plants with.

Another time, when Elisha passed through a town, he saw a woman with two sons. "Please, sir," the woman said, "I am a widow. My husband was a prophet. When he was alive he borrowed money from someone. He knew he could work and pay the man back. Then a terrible thing happened - my husband died.

Now that he is gone, we can never pay back the money. I don't have any money. All I have in my house is a little olive oil. The man that my husband borrowed from said that if I did not pay him back, he would take my sons away to be his slaves. I love my sons and I don't want anything bad to happen to them. Please help me!"

Elisha felt sorry for the woman. He wanted to help her. Elisha told the woman to tell her sons to go out and find all the empty jars that they could. They should borrow from their neighbours and friends.

The boys went out and did just as their mother said. They asked all the neighbours and all of their friends to give them their empty jars. Finally, there were no more jars left.

Elisha told the woman and her sons to go inside her house and shut the door. "Use the oil

that you have and fill the first jar and then set it aside. Then fill the next jar. Keep filling all the jars until there are not any left.”

The woman did not know how this could happen but she did as Elisha said. She knew that Elisha was a prophet of God. She and her sons went inside the house and shut the door. First, she filled one jar and then set it aside. Then she filled another and set it aside. Over and over she filled the jars with oil and her original jar never emptied out.

Finally, when she asked one of her sons to bring her another jar, he told her that there were no more jars left. All of the jars were full of oil.

The woman rushed outside to tell Elisha. Elisha told her to go and sell the oil. People would pay a lot of money for olive oil. It would be enough to pay off all the money that her husband had owed. Now her sons would not be taken away from her! She was so glad that Elisha helped her.

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using a variety of methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection, student interaction and/or emotion.

[Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.](#)

Review Questions:

1. What was Elisha’s job? He was a prophet of God
2. Why was the widow with two sons so sad? She could not pay her husband’s debts so the person they owed was going to take her sons as slaves.
3. What did Elisha tell the woman to send her sons to find? Empty jars
4. The widow only had a little oil. What did Elisha tell her to do with it? Fill all the rest of the jars

5. What did the widow do with all the olive oil? Sold it and paid off her husband's debt

Song Suggestions:

- [Give Me Oil in My Lamp Song](#)
- [Love is Something If You Give It Away Song](#)
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more options.

Learning Activities and Crafts:

[\(How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation\)](#)

Activities:

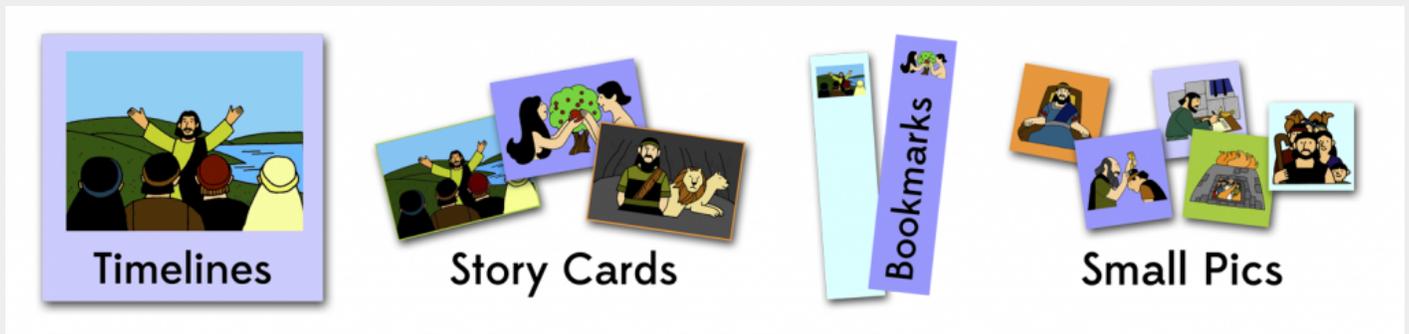
- Read and discuss [James 1:27](#).
- Arrange to visit a widow/widower and do some jobs around their house.
- Invite a widow, widower, or an orphan (or someone who has been in that position) to come to class and talk about what it is like to live in that situation.
- Bring olive oil to class so children can feel and smell it. Pour a little in a saucer and let the children dip some bread in it to have a taste.
- How about taste-testing some olives!
- Use a bible encyclopaedia to find out ways that olive oil was used in Old Testament times.

Crafts:

- Make a card or gift basket for a widow/widower in the congregation.
- Collect small jars and lids and bring them to class. Help children pour olive oil in each one and secure the lid tightly. Decorate the jars with ribbons, labels, etc. Add a label or tag that says "Elisha and the Widow's Oil: 2 Kings 4:1-7". Create your own labels or print label strips in the following paper sizes: [Labels in A4 size paper](#) or

[Labels in Letter size paper \(USA\).](#)

Check the [Teaching Ideas](#) page on this website for ideas that are adaptable to any lesson.



[Click here for "Elisha and the Widow's Oil" printables to print on A4 size paper](#)

[Click here for "Elisha and the Widow's Oil" printables \(Letter size-USA\)](#)

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Other Online Resources:

- [Colouring sheet and puzzle pages \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Daily devotional at http://www.biblelessons4kidz.com/](http://www.biblelessons4kidz.com/)
- [Pictures of jars to colour at http://www.mssscrafts.com/](http://www.mssscrafts.com/)
- [Picture of one jar at http://www.mssscrafts.com/](http://www.mssscrafts.com/)
- [Various Elijah and Elisha worksheets. Available at http://www.squidoo.com/bible-worksheets-OT](http://www.squidoo.com/bible-worksheets-OT). When you arrive at the page scroll down to "Samuel / Kings / Chronicles Sunday School Worksheets".
- [Lesson Plan for 3rd-5th graders at http://ministry-to-children.com/](http://ministry-to-children.com/)
- [Just something fun I found about 25 alternative uses for olive oil at http://www.curbly.com/](http://www.curbly.com/)

<https://www.pinterest.com/marynnz/the-prophets/>

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